

Students' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of using social media in learning foreign languages

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ABSTRACT

The benefits of social media applications have emerged as an advancement in teaching and learning foreign languages. However, it falls short of studies investigating the perspectives and experiences of educators and learners about social media usage in Vietnamese tertiary education contexts in rural areas. Therefore, this study examined the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students regarding the application of social media in foreign language learning at a university in the Mekong Delta, Southern Vietnam. The study was conducted with the participation of 199 students and 20 teachers. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, collecting data from questionnaires, and an in-depth interview. The findings showed that most teachers and students had a positive attitude towards applying this mode to teaching and learning foreign languages. However, they indicated some problems when utilizing those methods. Additionally, they suggested some measures for blending direct teaching and learning with social media based on their experience. The research results provided more insights into this field in the literature, especially in local settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has crucially impacted diverse aspects of people's lives, including work, finance, education, and entertainment [1], [2]. Due to the widespread use of social platforms, scholars and scientists have been analyzing their significance and influence on various features of life, including education, particularly in foreign language teaching. In this age of industry 4.0, a great deal of research has been carried out to assess the usefulness of social media platforms for mastering a second or foreign language [3]–[8].

Several studies have been conducted in different contexts to understand the significance of those in educating a foreign language. Additionally, some research has explored lecturers' and students' understanding of social networking learning platforms [9]–[12]. However, very few studies have explored the usage of social websites in teaching languages in Vietnam [13]–[17]. These were conducted in some high schools in central Vietnam and institutions in major cities, namely Ha Noi Capital and Ho Chi Minh City. Only research by Phan [18] was conducted in Can Tho City, southern Vietnam. Still, no research has been carried out in a remote region in the Mekong Delta, southern Vietnam. Hence, this research aims to provide new perspectives by combining teachers' and students' perceptions and practices of using those forms in cultivating foreign languages and to assess students' self-evaluation abilities for their language learning through social media sites.

Kaplan and Haenlein [19] describe social media as internet-based applications that utilize the infrastructure of Web 2.0 to facilitate the invention and transfer of user-generated content. This definition has gained widespread acceptance due to the numerous technologies it encompasses. There is a multitude of social-media types available such as various social networks (Facebook, Academia, and LinkedIn), collaborative authoring (Wikipedia and Google Docs), microblogging (Twitter and Tumblr), blogs and forums (LiveJournal and WordPress), media sharing (YouTube, Pinterest, and Flickr), web conferencing (Skype), geo-location based sites (Tinder), scheduling and meeting (Doodle, Google Calendar, and Microsoft Outlook), and learning platforms and massive open online courses (MOOCs) (OpenOLAT, Stud. IP, Moodle, and Coursera), and teachers can choose to utilize one or more depending on their teaching objectives [5].

The integration of social platforms in schools as well as universities cannot be ignored. It has been proven that using technological tools and innovative social digital means can inspire students to learn languages more effectively [20]. Social platforms can aid in learning a second or foreign language by employing connectivism and constructivism learning theories [5], [21], [22]. This means that they can be valuable instruments in developing a communicative approach to cultivating a foreign language. Additionally, Zhang and Wang [23] explored English-teacher-education students' competence in language learning and teaching, applied technology of MOOCs, micro-lessons, games, and social media. Moreover, Alkamel [24] conducted a synthesis of 30 studies conducted between 2015 and 2022, which revealed that a number of popular networking sites, such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Line, were utilized in instructing English.

Additionally, some studies have investigated the merits of social media services for studying language autonomously. Alkamel [24] synthesized that by applying social media websites, students could foster their language skills, improve their teamwork, and boost their motivation. Besides, Muhammad [25] researched on promoting English as foreign language (EFL) students' autonomy through e-media. The findings showed that students had greater control over the materials, cognitive processes, achievement, and learning management. Halawa [26] noted that students have become more independent, met untroubled, and developed their knowledge from digital sites.

Incorporating social websites into language learning methods is essential to meet the challenges of language skill development in the current era of revolution 4.0 [24]. Virtual chats and online discussions have replaced face-to-face conversations, altering e-media learners' daily language as well as language skills. Furthermore, learners have access to smartphones, laptops, and tablets with abundant social media applications, enriching their language input and output skills [6]. It expands the classroom into new, challenging domains and encourages students to apply what they learn in real communicative settings.

Therefore, educators need to recognize that the potentiality of digital websites can be considered as a valuable service for learners to evaluate their autonomous language practice. Berry [27] emphasizes that assessment as a part of learning is crucial for promoting learner autonomy. Learners can assess not only their skills but also those of their peers. They can engage in discussions about their learning progress and receive feedback from not only instructors but also friends. Despite this, previous research has largely overlooked the other function of e-media for self-assessment in language training. In the current research, the authors address this gap in the literature by exploring this aspect of social platforms to instruct foreign languages. Practical applications of this approach include using websites like Grammarly.com, Marking Mate, and free online tests to self-evaluate foreign language skills. By embracing the power of social media, lecturers can create a more effective and autonomous language learning experience for today's learners.

In summary, social media has been used for teaching and learning second or foreign languages for quite some time and has attracted attention from researchers worldwide. However, few have considered the possibility for the achievement of digital platforms as a self-assessment device in the process of learning one language. Therefore, this facet of e-media should be developed in further research, especially in local settings.

Several previous studies have indicated that both second/foreign language teachers and students have positive perceptions of applying social networks in acquiring a language. For instance, Desta *et al.* [12] fulfilled a study with 99 medical informants at Debre Tabor University in Ethiopia in English skills courses and found that most of them totally agreed with the advantages of utilizing them in learning English to increase their English capacity. In addition, Aloraini and Cardoso [9] surveyed the perceptions of 99 Saudi EFL participants towards using WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter as pedagogical tools for studying English at King Saud University. The results displayed the understanding of running those instruments between the two groups, which was different due to their various language learning purposes and the skills they chose to learn. Among those applications, Twitter was considered "an acceptable and reliable medium on which students can practice and learn EFL" [9]. Similarly, Namaziandost *et al.* [10] explored 200 EFL lecturers' and undergraduates' cognition of utilizing social networking sites to enhance students' speaking ability at Islamic Azad University, Iran. The results illustrated that both had a positive

understanding of applying social e-tools, namely Skype, WhatsApp, and Telegram, to improve students' oral competence in higher education. Additionally, Halawa [26] explored 32 English majors' thoughts on adopting YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. The findings demonstrated that participants felt delighted and unpressured when learning from those. Apoko and Waluyo [22] investigated 108 EFL students at a private institution in Indonesia and pointed out that Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp helped their English writing and speaking skills improve. In addition, they suggested that those sites should be integrated into curricula to foster EFL students' interest and competence.

In recent years, in the Vietnamese context, Pham *et al.* [13] researched 154 Vietnamese-speaking students' awareness of practicing e-sites to develop vocabulary in learning foreign languages at Van Lang University, in Ho Chi Minh City. As a result, participants who accessed Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, WeChat, Skype, WhatsApp, Telegram, Snapchat, and Tumblr had positive attitudes about learning and improving their vocabulary via those platforms. Additionally, Nguyen [28] carried out research with 21 first-year English major students practicing writing tasks via Google Docs and found that no significant influence of Google Docs and participants' writing group work marks happened. Yet, the findings displayed that informants, especially low ones, had a positive perception of Google Docs, social skills, and technological skills; meanwhile, they had negative opinions of costs and problems of dealing with Google materials on cell phones and the internet.

Studies have examined the advantages of incorporating social platforms into second language learning. One significant benefit is the reduction of communication apprehension and nervousness in virtual contexts, which results in increased motivation and self-confidence among second language (L2) students. This empowers them to produce L2 naturally and creatively, thereby creating anxiety-free areas [29]. Additionally, using social media has been shown to strengthen students' grammatical complication and expand their vocabulary towards achieving mastery in language acquisition, as well as enhance their oral proficiency, particularly in speaking and listening [21], [29], [30]. Moreover, the advent of new technologies has led to complicated combination schemes that have required new requests on writing, reading, looking at something, social interaction, and conversation [31]. Iswahyuni [32] revealed that 38 EFL volunteers at an independent university in Indonesia appropriated the profits of YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, in learning four skills of English, as well as vocabulary and grammar. Other studies [32], [33] found the same results in the four skills of English, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation via Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Furthermore, Al Fadda [34] indicated that Instagram was more effective in learning English than Snapchat. Besides, Khan *et al.* [35] expressed that Facebook and Google brought many merits to EFL-Afghan students, namely incorporating genuine input resources, creating low-stress practice environments, providing opportunities for intercultural communication, and fostering improved collaboration among learners.

In addition, Rahmawati *et al.* [36] applied short videos on TikTok to improve the EFL 32 informants' speaking skills. As a result, their vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, and comprehension were enhanced remarkably. Muftah [7] has synthesized the benefits of those approaches in studying a foreign language, stating that it can provide many opportunities for L2 learners to explore digital resources and documents that enhance their oral, written, listening, and reading competence. Furthermore, Muftah [7] confirmed these positive impacts on 166 EFL undergraduates at Najran University in Saudi Arabia in the COVID-19 period, providing further insights into this field. In a recent study in Vietnam [13], the participants at Van Lang University valued social websites in improving their vocabulary in learning a language. Ngo [16] applied TikTok Duet to 49 EFL students in Hanoi and found that their speaking skills, pronunciation, confidence, vocabulary, and grammar were improved. Nguyen and Ngo [17] conducted a study with 253 non-English majors in Ho Chi Minh City and indicated that they could find learning resources, learn autonomously, and join a learning community. Similarly, Phan [18] stated that her English-major ones develop searching resource skills, learning in teams, and involving motivation.

Nevertheless, Lin *et al.* [30] notes that online language use is often criticized for lacking coherence and proper structure. Similarly, Facebook had a detrimental effect on the language learning of Saudi L2 students [37]. Besides, other study findings [24], [35] showed undergraduates worried about distractions when joining social media teams and unreliable websites; meanwhile, instructors claimed time management and students' dishonesty when learning online [24]. Moreover, Alkamel [24] withdrew some more drawbacks from prior research that cultural and social components, including gender, a few activities out of the English classes, slow Wi-Fi connection, high cost of the internet, and old-fashioned computers, impacted students' studying language. Both Nguyen and Ngo [17] and Phan [18] found that distractions, lack of interactions, and overdependence on social media sites were the other side of using digital platforms.

Overall, few studies have been conducted for lecturers and undergraduates worldwide, especially in combining both teachers' and students' views and implementations regarding the social-media usage in educating foreign languages. A need to study more about this field is true to support the literature review, especially in other rural settings, and consider as learner-autonomous modes. Hence, this research is

a combination of both and fills this gap. To this end, the present study aims to review the diverse components and characteristics of operating social networks as a language learning tool. Specifically, social networking websites can serve as a helpful means of self-assessment for autonomous learners, but they also pose challenges for teachers and students alike. Ultimately, a nuanced understanding of social media services' position in mastering a language is necessary to leverage their potential benefits fully. Hence, the current research was conducted to seek responses to the following research questions:

- i) What are teachers' and students' perceptions of using social media in teaching and learning foreign languages at Dong Thap University (DTU), Vietnam?
- ii) What are teachers' and students' experiences regarding using social media in teaching and learning foreign languages at DTU, Vietnam?

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

The study involved 199 learners and 20 lecturers from the Foreign Languages Department at DTU in Southern Vietnam. They consisted of 26 translation majors, 82 English-teaching students, 21 business English majors, 22 tourism English majors, and 48 Chinese majors, spanning across sophomore, junior, and senior levels in the 2024-2025 academic year. Among them, 76 were between the ages of 18 and 20, and 123 were from 20 to 22 years old, comprising 56 males and 143 females. All participants volunteered for the study and completed a survey that assessed their perceptions of social media sites and their virtual platform usage. Freshmen were not included in the study as they had not yet entered DTU at that time. Additionally, 27 participants underwent in-depth interviews. The 20 teachers voluntarily participated in the study, including 2 Ph.D. and 18 MA holders, ranging from 27 to over 50 years old, with teaching experience ranging from 5 to over 30 years.

2.2. Research instruments

This research was examined by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches with two tools. The first instrument was a set of surveys including 31 items specifically designed for students in a quantitative study. These statements were evaluated on a 5-point scale that spans from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with 12 items in the perception session and 19 ones in the experience session. This was based on the widely accepted 5-point Likert-type scale, commonly used in educational research [38] as a proxy interval level of measurement. The teachers' questionnaire included 15 items, with 8 items focused on perceptions and 7 items on experiences. The second one was an in-depth interview conducted with 27 students and 20 teachers for the qualitative research. The questions in both sets of questionnaires and the interviews were based on the literature review.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

The two instruments were used to gather data from all participants' information. Then, the data were analyzed by SPSS. Our team coded and generated statistics. This analysis provided the means and standard deviations (SD). Moreover, the analyses drew insights from the findings of the interviews, and the accuracy of these statistics was focused on, which led to addressing research questions 1 and 2.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Achieving the relation between validity and reliability

First of all, the authors used SPSS to consider the reliability of the data of students' perceptions and had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.816. However, when our team ran the corrected item-total correlation, a total 8 of 12 items had a correlation value >0.3 , and the rest were item 1=0.139, item 4=0.113, item 5=0.115, and item 12=0.155 <0.3 . After items 1, 4, 5, and 12 were deleted, Cronbach's alpha was 0.878, and the rest 8 items gained a correlation value >0.3 . Similarly, the researchers ran the SPSS-based reliability of students' experiences and found that Cronbach's alpha was 0.882 >0.6 , and the corrected item-total correlation of item 18=0.269 <0.3 . Item 18 was then removed. The new Cronbach's alpha was 0.886, and the rest 18 items obtained a correlation value >0.3 , as displayed in Table 1.

For teachers' perceptions, the Cronbach's alpha of a set of questionnaires was 0.806, and only item 3 had a corrected item-total correlation=0.195 <0.3 . After item 3 was taken out, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.816, and the rest achieved correlation values of more than 0.3. For teachers' experiences, Cronbach's alpha was 0.716 >0.6 . Yet, the corrected item-total correlation of item 11 was 0.189 <0.3 , while the rest were above 0.3. When item 11 was erased, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.727. However, at that time, item 12 had a

correlation value of 0.284; therefore, item 12 was continuously deleted. After items 11 and 12 were removed, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.740, and the rest gained a correlation over 0.3, as seen in Table 2.

As can be seen in Tables 1 and 2 that all items had a good correlation coefficient of more than 0.3 and up to 0.844 (item 8). This contributed to the current research because our team used the previous literature to design sets of questionnaires that were not echoed with any prior research in Vietnam [13], [17], [18]. Furthermore, this is a foundation for the authors to design interview questions in the second phase.

Table 1. Item-total correlation (A) and Cronbach's alpha (B) of students' perceptions and experiences coming from items being deleted

Perceptions			Experiences		
Items	A	B	Items	A	B
2	0.746	0.851	13	0.363	0.886
3	0.500	0.877	14	0.468	0.882
6	0.591	0.868	15	0.475	0.882
7	0.646	0.863	16	0.440	0.883
8	0.682	0.859	17	0.342	0.887
9	0.488	0.878	19	0.516	0.881
10	0.767	0.848	20	0.448	0.883
11	0.712	0.856	21	0.455	0.883
			22	0.722	0.873
			23	0.581	0.878
			24	0.501	0.881
			25	0.518	0.880
			26	0.716	0.872
			27	0.642	0.876
			28	0.474	0.882
			29	0.435	0.883
			30	0.648	0.876
			31	0.551	0.879

Table 2. Item-total correlation (A) and Cronbach's alpha (B) of teachers' perceptions and experiences from the item being deleted

Perceptions			Experiences		
Items	A	B	Items	A	B
1	0.485	0.818	9	0.370	0.753
2	0.375	0.823	10	0.523	0.687
4	0.608	0.797	13	0.621	0.653
5	0.600	0.787	14	0.693	0.614
6	0.428	0.817	15	0.346	0.745
7	0.742	0.761			
8	0.844	0.733			

3.2. Quantitative data results

3.2.1. Students' perceptions

The results in Table 3 displayed that the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) values ranged from moderately high compared to an average of 3.00. It illustrated that informants perceived using social media for language learning positively. The highest mean score was for item 6, which suggested that they should use apps on the internet to self-practice the languages they were learning. In addition, the lowest was for item 2, meaning that respondents were not very confident in choosing what they should learn on social virtual sites. Students reported positively on items 7 and 11, with the other mean values ranging from 3.51 to 3.92.

Table 3. Students' perceptions of applying social networks in studying foreign languages

No	Items (N=8)	Mean	SD
2	I know what I should learn about social media.	3.45	1.136
3	I should find suitable websites to practice foreign languages autonomously instead of waiting for teachers' guidelines.	3.66	0.961
6	I should use social media sites to self-practice the languages that I am learning.	3.97	0.913
7	I should manage my time reasonably to learn languages on social media autonomously.	3.55	1.144
8	I believe that social media sites help me develop my potential.	3.74	0.911
9	I believe that social media sites help me have lifelong learning.	3.81	0.966
10	I believe that using social media is one form of applying information technology in learning foreign languages effectively.	3.51	1.114
11	I believe that classes become interesting if teachers integrate the use of social media into lessons.	3.92	0.955

3.2.2. Students' experiences

In Table 4, the mean values ranged from 3.17 to 3.96, which were all higher than the average of 3.00. The highest mean score was found in item 20 ($M=3.96$). Respondents also highly agreed on item 29 ($M=3.90$). However, the level of agreement on items 25 and 30 was the lowest ($M=3.17$). Item 24 had a low mean value ($M=3.18$, $SD=0.933$). However, the respondents were not much attracted to games as the rating in item 23 showed ($M=3.67$, $SD=0.876$). Hence, it can be concluded that the respondents tended to be attracted by other platforms (apart from games) while using digital media for learning. This can be a reason for item 17 showing that students do not feel stress or pressure when using social media to serve learner autonomy ($M=3.7$, $SD=0.870$), and they can balance time when accessing social websites for learner autonomy and entertainment as rated in item 22 ($M=3.68$, $SD=0.869$). Also, most agreed that they can find friends on social networks who can help them with studying ($M=3.55$, $SD=0.983$). The other items in the section were rated with mean values lower than 3.5, ranging from 3.31 to 3.44.

Table 4. Students' practices of using social means of learning foreign languages

No.	Items (N=18)	Mean	SD
13	I choose suitable websites/social media sites/online programs to practice speaking skills.	3.78	0.894
14	I choose suitable websites/social media sites/online programs to practice writing skills.	3.36	0.853
15	I choose suitable websites/social media sites/online programs to practice listening skills.	3.79	0.713
16	I choose suitable websites/social media sites/online programs to practice reading skills.	3.44	0.856
17	I don't feel stress and pressure when using social media, serving my learner autonomy.	3.70	0.870
19	I can deal with problems while using social media, serving my learner autonomy.	3.67	0.772
20	I can communicate well and behave politely with other people while using social media, serving my learner autonomy.	3.96	0.774
21	I am not sad when my friends on social networks behave badly towards me during my autonomous learning process.	3.31	0.860
22	I can balance time when I use social media for learner autonomy with one for entertainment.	3.68	0.869
23	I am not attracted to games online when using social networks.	3.67	0.876
24	I am not attracted to movies or music channels on the internet.	3.18	0.934
25	I am not attracted to other entertainment programs on the internet.	3.17	0.933
26	I find friends on social networks who help me with my study.	3.55	0.983
27	I often support my friends on social networks to be able to deal with their learning problems.	3.37	0.842
28	I often share useful websites/social networks/applications/ online programs related to learning languages with my offline and online friends.	3.75	0.768
29	I often share useful knowledge related to learning languages, which I learn on websites/social networks/applications/online programs, with my offline and online friends.	3.90	0.708
30	I have some groups to learn languages on social media sites.	3.17	0.875
31	I can self-assess my language learning results via online assessment tools.	3.35	0.827

3.2.3. Teachers' perceptions

In Table 5, mean values for each item ranged from 3.25 to 4.00, which were all higher than the average score of 3.00. Notably, items 2 and 7 received the highest mean score ($M=4.0$), indicating that the teachers in the study highly agreed on the advantages of adopting e-media in self-studying and that learners should be taught how to properly run social networking sites for learning. Additionally, they recognized that social digital means should be integrated into classroom instruction ($M=3.95$, $SD=0.605$). Moderate mean values were for items 1, 6, and 8, which dealt with social-virtual platform usage in the classes. Finally, item 5 received the lowest mean score ($M=3.25$, $SD=0.973$), suggesting that the teachers had the least agreement on the idea of using digital media for quizzes.

Table 5. Teachers' perceptions of using social digital sites in teaching foreign languages

No.	Items (N=7)	Mean	SD
1	Using social media can benefit students' learning in the classroom.	3.50	1.318
2	Using social media can benefit students' self-studying.	4.00	0.459
4	Social media should be incorporated into classroom instruction.	3.95	0.605
5	Students should take quizzes through social media.	3.25	0.967
6	Students have more chances to discuss the lessons through social media.	3.45	1.050
7	Students should be taught how to appropriately use social media for learning.	4.00	0.973
8	Students should be allowed to use social media as a learning tool in the classroom.	3.40	1.231

3.2.4. Teachers' experiences

In Table 6, the mean values were all above average at 3.00, ranging from 3.30 to 3.89. Notably, item 15 received the highest mean score ($M=3.89$, $SD=0.737$), indicating that the teachers reported positively

on the usefulness of social media in sending online quizzes and survey forms and receiving students' responses. Similarly, they believed that newspapers and videos were effective teaching tools, as revealed in item 14 ($M=3.85$, $SD=0.933$). Items 13 and 9 received moderately high ratings from the participants. Specifically, the former stated that social media usage in classroom activities by teachers would motivate students more ($M=3.65$, $SD=0.813$), and the latter indicated that learning on social media would enable students to learn and study from anywhere ($M=3.55$, $SD=0.688$). The lowest mean value was observed in item 10, which stated that using social networking sites makes it simpler for undergraduates to complete tasks and assignments ($M=3.30$, $SD=0.865$).

Table 6. Teachers' experiences of using social media in teaching foreign languages

No.	Items (N=5)	Mean	SD
9	Learning on social media would allow students to learn and study anywhere.	3.55	1.050
10	It would be easier for students to complete classwork and assignments if they could use social media.	3.30	0.865
13	Students will be more motivated if their teachers integrate social media into their lessons.	3.65	0.813
14	Newspapers and videos are effective tools for teaching	3.85	0.933
15	Teachers conveniently send online quizzes or survey forms to students and receive results from students' answers easily and quickly.	3.89	0.737

3.3. Qualitative data results

3.3.1. Students' perceptions

All 27 participants agreed that social media offered certain merits when used for language learning. Specifically, they found that social media helped them become independent learners, and many believed that students' cognitive and autonomous learning abilities played a crucial role in improving language competence. Additionally, they agreed that teachers should guide them in effectively exploring social media resources and providing support when needed. However, some students expressed skepticism about testing and self-assessing their language abilities on websites, citing difficulty in finding reliable sources to correct their writing, pronunciation, or speaking skills.

3.3.2. Students' experiences

When asked to list all types of social networks that participants have used to learn languages, they responded as displayed in Figure 1. Based on Figure 1, YouTube, Facebook, and Zalo (a popular social medium in Vietnam) are the preferred social networking sites among all 27 students. While 15 of them explored other applications to learn languages, they still surfed a diverse range of virtual platforms to learn foreign languages. Out of the 27 students, 5 only used one social medium, 8 utilized 2, 10 accessed 3, and 4 explored more than 3 virtual platforms to learn languages. When questioned about their daily social media usage, 3 out of the 27 students spent from 10 to 45 minutes on these platforms, while 10 consumed 1 to 2 hours, and 7 put in 2 to 3 hours. The 4 students put in 4 to 5 hours, and 3 participants accessed social networking sites for more than 5 hours daily. They shared that they practiced listening, reading, speaking, and writing in various languages on these websites and picked up vocabulary and grammar. However, some found it challenging to accurately assess their language proficiency through online platforms.

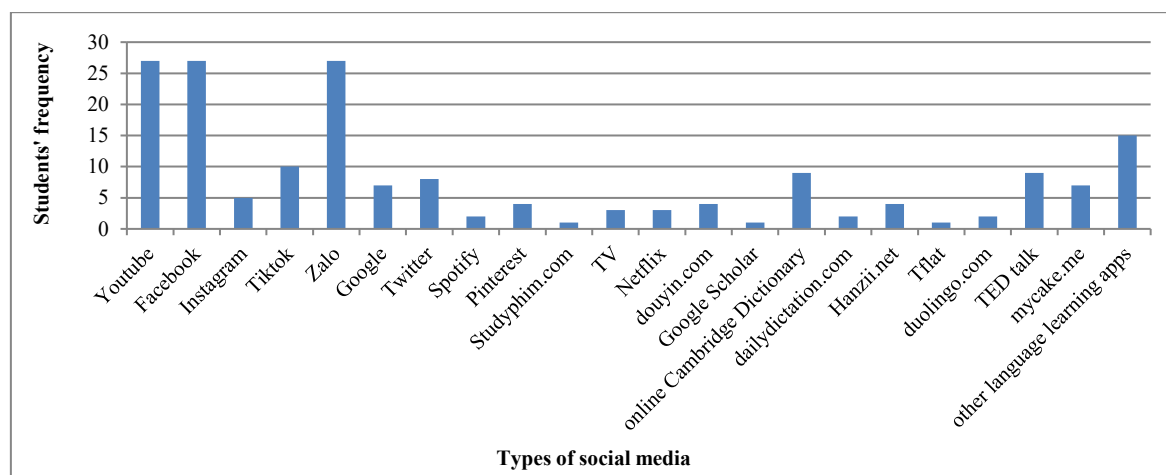


Figure 1. Social platforms used by students to learn foreign languages

3.3.3. Teachers' perceptions

Out of the 20 interviewed teachers, 14 expressed positive attitudes towards incorporating social media into language teaching. These teachers found social media to be beneficial for themselves and their students, as they tested social media tools first before introducing them to their students as a mode to practice language skills beyond the classroom. They believed that social media aided students in learning languages in a more self-directed and engaged manner. However, the remaining ones did not view social media as a helpful application for studying. They felt their learners lacked the necessary awareness when using social e-platforms, resulting in ineffective learning on virtual platforms. Some of these teachers acknowledged that they needed to learn how to use social media more effectively before integrating it into their teaching. Others did not see social platforms as a useful or reliable instrument for testing and assessment in language instruction.

3.3.4. Teachers' experiences

When asked about types of social platforms that teachers had ever applied in teaching languages, they answered like the following. Figure 2 reveals that most language teachers (16 out of 20) used YouTube, followed by Zalo (14 out of 20) and Facebook (9 out of 20) as their preferred social websites for education; meanwhile, others were seldom applied. When inquired about how often lecturers engaged with social networks, 17 out of 20 reported accessing them every day, while only 2 out of 20 accessed them 2 to 4 times a week, and 1 out of 20 signed in once a week. Regarding the frequency of adopting social means in instructing languages, 2 teachers responded with "always", 4 said "so often", 9 answered "sometimes", and 5 answered "hardly". The 15 out of 17 logging in e-media faced threats when they first handled it in teaching languages, namely the unavailability of an internet connection at DTU. When asked about the platform they learned to apply those in the teaching process, 17 out of 20 responded that they learned them from a virtual one, while 2 of them attended a training course, and 1 attended a workshop. Finally, when asked if they could implement those in instruction effectively, Teacher 1 stated that teachers can leverage social media to enhance their teaching effectiveness in three ways: i) by informing students of teaching schedules, teaching avenues, and teaching contents; ii) by sending and receiving feedback on teaching and learning activities; and iii) by using the available reels, videos, stories, personal thoughts, as text corpus or language input for teaching activities. The 8 had ever applied social networks in instructing languages before and provided more reasons; for instance, it was a convenient and friendly tool, effective for part-time courses, and created excitement among students. The 2 had a commonality of employing social virtual modes in their courses, while one only used Zalo to connect with their students and send files, instructions, and information to them. The 4 studied how to operate social e-platforms effectively in teaching; meanwhile, the rest did not use it because they believed it was not relevant or suitable for their subjects.

The present work attempted to explore students' and teachers' understanding and practices of employing social networks in educating foreign languages at DTU in a rural area, in the Mekong Delta, Southern Vietnam. This section will focus on the discussion of two research questions. Besides, some novelties of the current study were mentioned and compared with the prior ones.

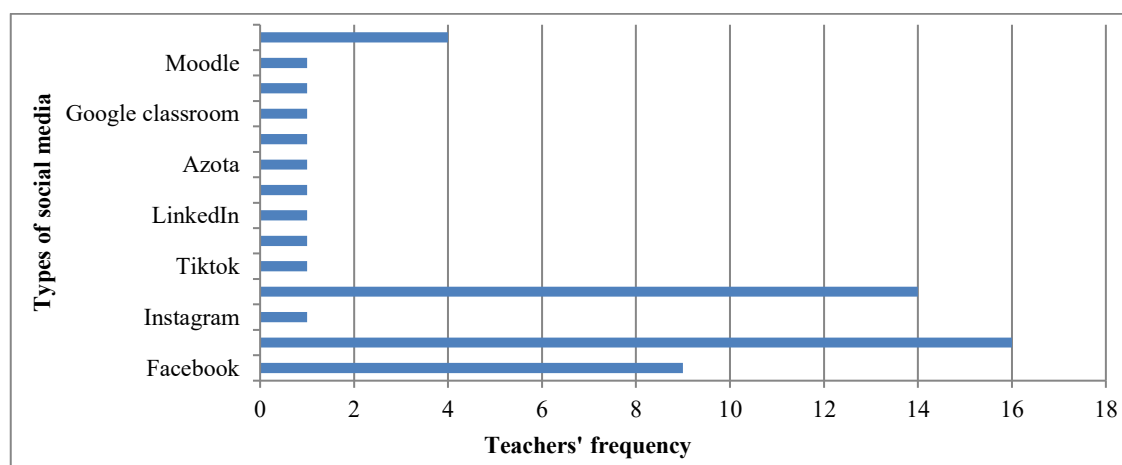


Figure 2. Types of social media used by teachers in teaching foreign languages

3.3.5. Educators' and students' thoughts on applying social media at Dong Thap University

The results indicate that teachers and students alike hold positive views on incorporating social media into language learning. They believed that it could offer many benefits and agreed on its integration into the learning process. These results are consistent with previous studies [7], [9], [10], [13], [14], [29]. Additionally, the data showed that many students agreed with the statements that they should choose, use, and manage social media for their autonomous learning, as evidenced by items 3, 6, and 7, which had mean scores of 3.66, 3.97, and 3.55, respectively. This is the same as Muhammad [25] and Halawa [26] results. The majority of teachers believed that social media brought many merits to students' autonomous learning via item 2 (M=4.00). This is one novelty of this research, as early studies did not explore it from teachers' viewpoints. One additional new point in this study was that a number of students believed social media helped them with lifelong learning, as indicated in item 9, with a mean score of 3.81. In addition, when it comes to evaluating virtual testing and assessment platforms, reliability is a key consideration. For instance, when asked about statement 5 (M=3.25), many teachers had positive perceptions of utilizing quizzes via e-media sites for language students. It is also a novelty in this research since the prior studies overseas and in Vietnam researched the assets and threats of implementing social media in teaching and learning English.

3.3.6. Teachers' and students' experiences of using social media at Dong Thap University

After having utilized virtual platforms extensively in education, both educators and informants have come to appreciate the benefits of this digital form, particularly when it comes to practicing languages independently outside of the classroom. Their experiences on social media align with several previous studies [7], [9], [10], [13], [15], [29]. Notably, according to students' responses in items 25 and 30, they have the same mean score (3.17), and the smallest ones compared with the others. Some students still do not have a balance between using social media to learn and entertain themselves. Additionally, they have not formed groups to learn languages online together. Other researchers or educators can leverage this information for future investigations.

In terms of assessment, more than half of both teachers and students strongly agreed that the online assessment tool, as in statement 15 (M=3.89), was easy and fast, and students could use it to self-assess their language results (item 31, M=3.35). Meanwhile, other research has not focused on virtual assessment tools; it has just explored social websites integrated into teaching and learning languages. Hence, to ensure that students can learn languages more independently and effectively, it is essential to provide instruction and support for online assessment devices and websites. This is particularly important for those who wish to employ this field in their digital teaching and learning experience and represents a departure from previous studies.

In the final question of a recent teacher interview, 13 out of 20 teachers confirmed that they would effectively incorporate social networking sites into their teaching approaches. However, 2 of them expressed that they did not access these online platforms due to a lack of understanding regarding the advantages they offer. The remaining teachers were open to the idea of utilizing social virtual platforms in their teaching and were currently studying the field. Notably, the 7 lecturers who were not interested in social media were over the age of 40 and had to self-educate on the topic through online resources. It is important to note that DTU has not yet provided official training courses for instructors on how to incorporate social networking sites into the teaching process. As a result, when teachers are not well-versed in technology and the various modes of social media usage, they may struggle to effectively instruct their learners in several ways of using these platforms to enhance their language learning.

Additionally, the present study achieved two more important points. First, the two sets of questionnaires as well as the interview questions were thoughtfully developed, informed by the valuable insights gathered from the literature review. The authors considered the real situation in the rural university and the participants' conditions to create the appropriate items and questions. This is the research team's contribution to this study, which is different from others. Second, while previous studies explored only one side of teachers' or students' or both perceptions or practices of applying social media in teaching and learning English [9]–[13], [16], [17], [21], [26], [28], [31], the current study investigated two sides from both teachers' and students' cognitions and experience of utilizing virtual sites. This gave the researchers insight into this field.

4. CONCLUSION

It is crucial to examine how both teachers and students perceive and utilize social media in foreign language education, particularly in the current industry 4.0 era. This study sheds light on the local context of university teachers' and students' experiences with social networks in the Mekong Delta area and virtual assessment forms. The findings and discussions clearly demonstrate that combining social platforms into foreign language training is essential for both lecturers and learners at DTU. Hence, to improve the quality of

social media integration in language education at DTU, the authors suggest that administrators organize updated training courses or workshops on this topic. They should also explore the functions of social media as a blended-learning approach and leverage online assessment tools to support students' autonomous language learning. These steps will provide deeper insights into this field and enhance the overall language education experience at DTU.

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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author [LTNA], upon reasonable request.

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